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Soviet Subterfuge a SALT Concern

The key to the strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT), and to its chances of approval by the Senate, is "verification." Senators want to be sure the Soviet Union isn't cheating on the number and variety of its nuclear weapons.

President Carter has reassured them. "We are confident," he declared last month, "that no significant violation of the treaty could take place without the United States detecting it."

But secret documents do not support the president's rosy assurance that the Soviets will be unable to fool us. A "top secret" report in the National Intelligence Daily, the CIA's hush-hush information newspaper for top government leaders, has this to say: "In view of our incomplete understanding of Soviet concealment and deception activities and in view of the inconsistencies and unevenness of their use by various parts of the [Soviet] strategic forces . . . our forecast . . . in this field must be highly tentative."

The report warns that despite the "considerable political, economic and even military risks involved . . . we cannot exclude the possibility that Soviet leaders, if they believed they could succeed, would approve a program of concealment and deception designed to help gain a strategic advantage over the U.S."

The CIA report speculates that "an effort of this scope almost certainly was approved at a high political level." The CIA is convinced, in other words, that the men in the Kremlin are per-

fectedly willing to cheat on the SALT agreements, and our intelligence techniques can't prevent them from getting away with it.

From secret documents and from intelligence sources close to the SALT negotiations, we learned the details of several of the Russians' tricks. They have been using them since at least 1964 to hide their weapons strength from American intelligence. Part of the story:

One relatively simple screen the Russians use for their strategic weapons was described to us by a source: "When the Russians move mobile missiles, there is sometimes a long logistics trail. It's like a circus of vehicles going through the country and is as easily detected. But if they break the caravan up, moving one truck at a time, we might not learn about the move."

Beginning about 1964, the Soviets began "disruptive painting" of their intercontinental ballistic missile complexes, constructing dummy roads, facilities, equipment and launch sites — modern versions of "Potemkin villages" by the people who invented the technique.

In 1966, the Russians learned to time their activities to our satellite schedules. "In response to warnings of the approach of U.S. reconnaissance satellites, passed to all branches of the Soviet military establishment," one document notes, "both surface-to-air missile and air-warning-and-control radars restrict their electronic emissions at times when the emissions would be

susceptible to interception by the satellites."

In 1967, the Russians began building tunnels big enough to hide up to 20 missile-carrying submarines. Dummy subs were constructed to confuse American spies, and canvas or "environmental" coverings were used to camouflage the facilities.

Though the CIA claimed these subterfuges never "seriously hampered our ability to maintain an accurate count of Soviet submarines," the agency admitted that it made it tougher to figure out a far more vital statistic — the number of Soviet subs in port at any given moment.

In 1974 and 1975, the CIA discovered that the Soviets were partially covering submarine hull sections awaiting assembly at Severodvinsk, and concluded that "these actions were clearly attempts to deny the United States information on missile-launching subs before they are built."

The most innovative and potentially dangerous deception began in May, 1974. That was "telemetry encoding," or making messages from test missiles indecipherable to non-Soviet monitors.

It is tricks like these that have given many members of the Senate cause for concern. One senator put the case for caution bluntly: "We have consistently underestimated Soviet capability. The past track record is not encouraging."

Senate skeptics, with good reason, are not viewing the SALT II agreement through Jimmy Carter's rose-colored glasses.